

Skinner-Trowbridge House
46 Hillhouse Avenue
New Haven
New Haven County
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-272
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
801 - 19th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-272

SKINNER-TROWBRIDGE HOUSE

Location: 46 Hillhouse Avenue (west side of Hillhouse between Trumbull and Sachem Streets), New Haven, Connecticut.

Present Owner: Miss C. Rachel Trowbridge.

Present Occupant: Miss C. Rachel Trowbridge.

Present Use: Residence.

Statement of Significance: Fine Creek Revival house of five bays, two-and-one-half stories, with a prostyle tetrastyle portico. Attributed to Ithiel Town who built many other New Haven structures based on Creek designs. Early photographs indicate house was derived from Greenough Villa in Regent's Park, London by architect Decimus Burton, 1823.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Following is chain of title taken from New Haven County Land Records for the City of New Haven. Reference is to number of volume and page.

Sept. 23, 1830 James A. Hillhouse to Aaron N. Skinner. "Be it remembered that it is the 23rd day of September 1830 agreed between James A. Hillhouse and Aaron N. Skinner both of New Haven City that in consideration the said Hillhouse convey to the said Skinner for the sum of one thousand dollars a lot one hundred feet wide situated on the west side of Hillhouse Avenue, sometimes called Temple Avenue ...The said Skinner covenants and agrees to build a dwelling house on said lot, to cost not less than three thousand and five hundred dollars; to place the front of the house not less than fifty feet from the avenue, to commence building within two years from the first of May next, and to complete the house within a year and a half from the time of commencing ..." Elisha Munson, Sept. 24, 1830. Town Clerk. Vol. 75, p. 423.

Before Oct. 16, 1858 Land deed specifying the inclusion of a dwelling house and with these stipulations regarding the consideration: Mortgage to Yale College for \$10,000 and one to Joseph E. Sheffield for \$11,000. Skinner would pay interest on these mortgages until January 1, 1859 and Boardman was to assume mortgages as part of the consideration and begin to pay interest on them after January 1, 1859. Vol. 177, p. 120.

Oct. 16, 1858 Aaron N. Skinner sold the land with house to William W. Boardman for \$30,000.00. Vol. 177, p. 120.

December 1906 By a complex of deeds executed in New York by the heirs of William W. Boardman, May W. Trowbridge purchased the above lot for \$1.00 and other considerations. Vol. 595, p. 342. The various grantors were:

Mason W. Tyler, Henry H. Schroeder, Henry Mosle and Cornelia E. Boardman Mosle, William J. Boardman, Amanda Boardman, Frederick A. Boardman, Cornelia Wright, Mason W. Tyler, William S. Tyler, Cornelius Boardman Tyler.

2. Date of erection: c. 1834 (Agreement between Hillhouse and Skinner contained a series of severe penalties to be imposed by said Hillhouse upon Skinner in the event that these latter conditions were not complied with. It is therefore to be assumed that the dwelling house in question was completed at the latest by December, 1834.).
3. Architect: Attributed to Ithiel Town, 1784-1844.
4. Original plans, construction, etc: Excerpts from a book, Town and Davis, Architects, by Roger Hale Newton:

"While the Russell mansion promptly placed the firm in the front ranks of Revivalist architects, it hardly typified the Grecian suburban villa as thoroughly as did that of Mayor Aaron Skinner on Hillhouse Avenue in New Haven....since the Skinner villa could be considered fairly representative of at least nine other Town and Davis temple houses within a radius of fifty miles, I shall sketch its salient features. Its cruciform plan and mixture of orders recalled many new villas which Town had seen rising about Regent's Park, London, and elsewhere, as well as engraved views of what English architects had been doing for at least a decade.....Before

leaving the Aaron Skinner villa, I should say that Henry Austin added a second floor to the angle pavilions and changed the window frames to his favorite pattern."

5. Alterations and additions: Hoggson Bros., architects, New York City. Early photographs indicate that alterations destroyed the cruciform shape of second floor. Existing shape is now an off-center Tee with an additional projecting portico on the east.

Additions made in 1907: Northeast corner, second floor, north side bay window (to enlarge dining room which also enlarged basement laundry room), west side open porch, west two floor addition to provide kitchen-dining area on ground floor and den on first floor.

Second floor, southeast corner added between 1860 and 1870.

6. Important old views: Photograph, lateral view, East; photograph, front (undated); photograph front, (East) Elevation c. 1860. Photocopy of drawing, front (East) Elevation 1860.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Dana, Arnold G. "New Haven Old and New," unpublished scrapbooks in the archives of the New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Conn.

Interviews with John D. Hoag, Art Librarian, The New Haven Preservation Trust, New Haven, Conn.

Interviews and correspondence with Miss C. Rachel Trowbridge, New Haven, Conn.

2. Secondary and published sources:

New Haven City Directory, 1840 to 1952. Copies in the Yale Library, New Haven Public Library, Town Clerk's office, and New Haven Colony Historical Society.

Newton, Roger Hale. Town and Davis, Architects. New York: Columbia University Press, 1942.

The New Haven Land Records, in the Land Records office, Hall of Records, Orange Street, New Haven, Conn.

Prepared by Jonathan B. Conant
Research Assistant
National Park Service
August 31, 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Fine example of Greek Revival house attributed to Ithiel Town. Photographs prior to alterations appear to indicate, by reason of cruciform shape of second floor, that house was based on the design of Greenough Villa in Regent's Park, London, by Decimus Burton, 1823.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 57'-6-1/2" x 84'-9-1/2". Five bays, two and one half stories. Due to alterations, existing plan shape is an off-center Tee with additional projecting portico on the east.
2. Foundations: Stone and brick.
3. Wall construction: Stucco plaster on brick above a water-table of dressed and rough stone. Stucco is scored with black painted joints representing stone coursings which average 18" x 65". The walls and trim are painted dark brown.
4. Framing: Brick exterior bearing walls extend 2'-0" above attic floor. Roof framing, visible in attic, consists of heavy timber plates, spliced and pegged lengthwise, into which roof rafters are notched. Upper ends of roof rafters are mortised and tenoned into ridge beams which are supported by wooden posts. Posts are diagonally braced by wooden members notched into posts near the top and let into exterior brick walls at attic floor line. Posts are additionally braced by iron angles and pin which is held fast with an iron wedge.
5. Porches, stoops, etc.: Main entrance porch on south side is one story with fluted Doric columns, stone floor, plaster ceiling, and stone steps with iron balustrade leading to main entrance walkway. Two story Ionic portico on east has wooden floor and wooden steps on north end with access to interior drawing room through tall double-hung windows. Rear west porch has paired fluted Doric columns supporting exposed beams which extend four feet beyond column line; effect is pergola-like with open eave effect. The ends of these beams are finished in scroll design. Porch has wooden floor and railing. Access to porch is through double-hung library windows. Rear exterior wooden steps lead to small portico and doorway between west porch and billiard room.
6. Chimneys: Seven existing chimneys on the roof, eight at attic level.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Recessed main entrance door on south porch has stone sill; single large beveled glass panel door with side-lights fitted with inswinging casements and screens. Sidelights are leaded in three panel design. Above door and side-lights is flat arched fan light with leaded panels in radiating and scalloped design. Door trim consists of simple panelled pilasters with molded architrave, projecting over pilasters. Keystone projects slightly from wall plane.
- b. Windows and shutters: First floor: East front; five full length wooden double-hung, six-over-nine windows surrounded by a flat band of stucco which widens at top and bottom in a curved flare. End windows are capped with horizontal pediments supported by volute brackets.

Second floor: Five double-hung, six-over-six windows are in alignment with first floor windows. End windows of later date are ornamented with heavy bracketed sills and upper sash is rounded at both corners. The treatment of end windows on both floors is repeated in end windows toward east on both north and south elevations. All other windows on these elevations are simple six-over-six double-hung windows without trim.

Windows in the bay on the north consist of two curved windows in each curved section of the bay. Rectangular windows set in attic frieze are pivoted and basement windows above grade are six-over-six double-hung.

Billiard room alcove on west side has wide horizontal leaded and stained glass window.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Irregular flat hipped roof with modern asbestos shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The entablature of the portico continues as a cornice around entire house. It is interrupted only where two corner rooms were added to second floor on the east. Entablature consists of banded architrave, plain frieze (containing attic windows), and molded cornice member. Raking cornice of pediment is more elaborately molded. Cornice at the north bow window is given a more elaborate classical treatment with arrangement of metopes, triglyphs and dentils surmounted by a balustrade combining turned balusters over curved portions of the wall and a flat panel over the flat center section.

- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: There are two flat dormers and a skylight on the roof not visible from the ground.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Wide entrance hall leads from south entrance porch to dining room on north. Hall turns at right angles to the left near dining room door; main staircase is on the north wall. In the angle between these two halls is the library. To the east of the main entrance hall are three rooms; reception room, drawing room and music room. Music room opens onto dining room. Two doors at the end of the hall lead to exterior and to rear wing which contains a rear stairway, pantry and billiard room. A stairway under this set of stairs leads to the cellar.
 - b. Second floor: Second floor, not included in the measurements, follows the general plan of the first floor, accommodating bedrooms, sitting rooms, closets and baths.
 - c. Attic: One large open Tee-shaped space which clearly defines the original limits of the house with a half-brick wall dividing space from the attics under the roof of the second story corner additions. The attic space over the rear wing on the west is sub-divided into servants' quarters consisting of two bedrooms, sitting room and bath.
 - d. Cellar: Under the rear wing is the kitchen and scullery. Under the main house are a modern laundry, utility and storage rooms and servant's room separated by the main bearing walls of the foundation. Of particular interest in the cellar is the fact that the exterior bearing wall on the north follows the contour of the bay window which was added in the dining room above.
2. Stairways: Both front and rear stairs are inter-connected at the landing by a doorway. Front stair has ten risers, rear stair has sixteen, attic stair has fourteen risers.
 3. Flooring: First floor, parquetry of narrow boards; basement, brick and modern cement; attic, wide boards.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Wallpapered walls, plaster ceilings.
 5. Doorways and doors: All first floor openings are cased without doors and are furnished with brass rods and curtains.

6. Decorative features and trim: Doors and windows are trimmed with molded jambs and heads with rosettes carved in blocks at the intersections. Molded wooden cornice in first floor east rooms extends out as a flat banded panel in the ceiling plane with molded rosettes placed in the intersecting right angles of the panels. Entrance hall cornice profile is more elaborate and the ceiling plane section is a deeply carved chevronsque banding. Door and baseboard trim is flat and of simple profile. Window reveals are hinged panelled shutters.
7. Notable hardware: None.
8. Lighting, type of fixtures: There are no overhead fixtures in first floor main rooms, nor evidence of previous fixtures. Modern electric outlets have been installed.
9. Heating: Drawing room fireplace is faced with small white glazed rectangular tiles which are also used on the hearth. Cast-iron fireback has Greek-key design banding at top and bottom. Wooden mantelpiece has slender fluted engaged columns supporting a simple architrave which breaks out over the columns. A carved elliptical rosette is applied to the block over the column and an unadorned raised panel is centered in the frieze.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces east on a short street of large mansions of high quality. The property extends through the block to Prospect Street which is the west boundary.
2. Enclosures: The extensive grounds are enclosed, front and rear, by a decorative iron fence with red sandstone gateposts.
3. Outbuildings: Two modern service buildings are located in the rear.
4. Walks: Front walkway consists of original large flagstones. Garden walkways are 3/8" bluestone. Rear driveway and walks are blacktop, covered in 1955.
5. Landscaping: There is a formal boxwood garden in the rear yard which retains the original design.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
June 1964

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Summer, 1964 New Haven Project, jointly undertaken by the HABS and the New Haven Preservation Trust, and financed by "Mission 66" funds of the National Park Service with assistance from the NHPT, following a 1963 HABS inventory survey of old New Haven carried out by the NHPT under the direction of Professor Christopher Tunnard of Yale University, President.

The project was under the direction of the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, and was supervised by Architect Woodrow W. Wilkins, Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky, assisted by Ned Goode, Photographer, Frazier, Pennsylvania; Annette H. M. Gottschalk, William P. Hersey, and Charles R. Tichy, Student Assistant Architects and students at Carnegie Institute of Technology, Yale University, and Iowa State University, respectively; and Jonathan B. Conant, Research Assistant and student at Yale University.